

United States Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management
Northeastern States Field Office
LLES003420

Environmental Assessment

DOI-BLM-ES030-2014-0003-EA

Winnebago Island Right-of-Way Electric Transmission Line and Tower Rock Island County, Illinois

Date: July 2014

Type of Action: Right-of-Way Application
Rock Island County, Illinois

Serial Number: ILES-057926 (ILBML-060751)

Location: 4th Principal Meridian - Illinois
Township 18 North, Range 1 West,
Section 24, Lot 4
Rock Island County, Illinois

Project Acreage: 0.50 acres

Bureau of Land Management, Northeastern States Field Office
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared to analyze and disclose the site specific environmental impacts of re-authorizing an existing electric transmission line and tower on Winnebago Island in Rock County, Illinois under the authority of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1713), as amended.

1.1 BACKGROUND

The Iowa-Illinois Gas and Electric Company received a right-of-way (ROW) grant from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) on behalf of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) on August 27, 1962, under the authority of the Act of March 4, 1911 (36 Stat. 1253) for an electric transmission power line and tower across an island in the Mississippi River located in Rock County, Illinois. The island known as Winnebago Island was reserved by Executive Order (EO) 4280 dated August 7, 1925 for wildlife purposes in connection with the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. Prior to 1970, all ROWs crossing FWS Refuge System lands were issued by the BLM. The ROW on Winnebago Island, serial number ILBLM-060751, issued for a term of 50 years, expired on August 26, 2012.

In 1995, the Iowa-Illinois Gas and Electric Company merged with Midwest Resources to become the MidAmerican Energy Company. In 2008, the BLM collected rent through the expiration of the grant and notified MidAmerican Energy Company that the ROW could not be renewed under the Act of March 4, 1911. Repealed by FLPMA in 1976, a ROW issued under the Act of March 4, 1911 requires re-authorization under current regulations. In a letter dated January 29, 2008, the BLM advised MidAmerican to submit an application for continued operations on Winnebago Island at least 60 days in advance of the August 2012 expiration. Although the BLM no longer issues ROW grants on behalf of the FWS, the BLM continues to assist the FWS with pre-1970 grants through the terms of the grants. When the grant for MidAmerican Energy expired, the BLM contacted the Company to inform them that a new application for continued use of Federal land was required. Standard Form 299-Application for transportation and Utility Systems and Facilities on Federal Lands was sent to the MidAmerican Energy Company. On October 21, 2013, MidAmerican Energy Company returned a completed application to the BLM.

The application for continued use of operations on Winnebago Island was forwarded to the FWS on November 15, 2013 for appropriate action. The FWS returned the application to the BLM on March 5, 2014. The FWS expressed an interest in relinquishing custody and control of Winnebago Island and a preference for the BLM to process the application submitted by the MidAmerican Energy Company. The FWS does not accept ownership of Winnebago Island and is not opposed to the re-authorization of the ROW. Because the BLM has authority to issue ROWs on withdrawn land, the application will be considered under the authority of FLPMA. Since the application to renew the original ROW grant was not received prior to the expiration date of the grant, a categorical exclusion cannot be utilized for this application and an environmental assessment (EA) is required.

1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED OF PROPOSED ACTION, DECISION TO BE MADE

Purpose of Proposed Action

The purpose of the proposed action is to provide continued ROW access across Federal land for the transmission of electric energy in accordance with regulations. The existing transmission line has been in operation providing essential electric energy to the Quad Cities since 1964. Re-authorizing the ROW under current authorities will bring the existing use of Federal land in compliance with current authorities, resolve unauthorized use of Federal land without proper permit, and it will continue to support the transmission of electric energy for consumers in the Quad Cities area.

Need for Proposed Action

The BLM's need for the proposed action is to respond to an application submitted by the MidAmerican Energy Company to re-authorize an existing ROW for an electric transmission line and tower that crosses Federal land. The BLM is responsible for issuing ROWs and renewals of ROWs across Federal land as established under Section 501 of FLPMA and in accordance with regulations at 43 Code of Federal Register (CFR) Part 2800. BLM policy is to renew a ROW grant as long as the holder is continuing to use, maintain, and operate the ROW in compliance with the original terms and conditions of the grant, applicable laws and regulations, and current land use plans.

Decision to be made

Based on the information provided in this EA, the Field Manager of the BLM Northeastern States Field Office, as the Authorized Officer, will decide whether a finding of no significant impact can be made regarding the request to continue the use of Federal land for an existing electric transmission power line and tower. The Field Manager will decide whether to approve the continued use of the land for an electric transmission line or whether to reject the application and require the removal of facilities.

1.3 CONFORMANCE WITH BLM LAND USE PLAN

The proposed action is in accordance with the Illinois Planning Analysis and Record of Decision dated September 30, 1987. The land on Winnebago Island is withdrawn by Executive Order. Lands withdrawn for the BLM or other Federal agencies meet the retention criteria established in the Illinois Planning Analysis and are subject to the general land laws including the provision for ROWs under Title V of FLPMA.

1.4 RELATIONSHIPS TO STATUTES, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PLANS

This EA is prepared pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and subsequent regulations adopted by the Council of Environmental Quality (40 CFR §1500). The EA is intended to be a concise public document which analyzes the probable and known environmental impacts of the proposed action and the alternative(s) upon the components of the human environment and reaches a conclusion as to their significance. The ultimate decision of this EA must ensure that the actions approved are not only in the best interest of the public, but would

not result in a significant impact to the human environment (40 CFR §1508.13). The original grant that authorized the use of the land for a transmission ROW in 1962 predates the enactment of NEPA, and an EA would not have been completed in connection with the initial grant.

The authority for the proposed action, found in Section 501 of the FLPMA and implementing regulations at 43 CFR 2800, allows the BLM to grant, in its discretion, ROWs on public land. Winnebago Island is withdrawn public domain land. Departmental policy for withdrawn lands at 603 Departmental Manual (DM) 1 allows uses on withdrawn lands that do not conflict with the purpose of the withdrawal. Winnebago Island was withdrawn for the preservation of wildlife habitat. 603 DM 1 (F.) states that “Unless exclusive use of the lands is required, lands shall be available for other public purposes to the fullest extent possible consistent with the purpose of the withdrawal”. When the grant was originally issued in 1962, the use of land on Winnebago Island for the existing tower and electric transmission line was not found to be in conflict with the purpose of the withdrawal for wildlife habitat preservation.

Although the original authorization predates the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, the renewal of the ROW is not subject to current review under Section 106 requirements because there will be no new ground disturbance. However, any future physical modification of the ROW, including replacement, removal, or maintenance of the tower requiring ground disturbing activity, will result in Section 106 analysis including a cultural resources survey and consultation with the Illinois State Historic Preservation Office and appropriate Native American Tribes.

1.5 SCOPING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Scoping is an important part of the NEPA process and determines the scope of key issues related to a proposed action (40 CFR §1500.7). Scoping can involve federal, state, and local government agencies, tribal governments, resource specialists, industry representatives, local interest groups, and other members of the public. Because this is an existing transmission line and there will be no changes or expansion of the current facilities, scoping was limited to an internal review by the Interdisciplinary Team.

1.6 IDENTIFICATION OF ISSUES

Key issues defined by the Interdisciplinary Team are those that 1) drive the analysis of environmental effects; 2) prescribe or necessitate the development of mitigation measures; and/or 3) drive the development of additional project alternatives. These issues are carried forward for analysis in Chapter 3.0 of the EA. The key issues are summarized as follows:

- Will continued use of the facilities on Winnebago Island impact other land use and resource values?
- Will continued use of the facilities impact wildlife?
- Will continued use of the facilities have socio-economic or environmental justice impacts?
-

2.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

2.1 PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action would re-authorize an existing electric transmission ROW for a 20 year renewal term under the provisions of the FLPMA to provide continued access on Winnebago Island for electric energy transmission. Winnebago Island was surveyed in 1962 and legally described as:

Fourth Principal Meridian, Illinois,
Township 18 North, Range 1 West,
Section 24, Lot 4

The existing transmission line is a double circuit 69,000 volt, three-phase electric transmission line, 795 MCM ACSR conductor, supported by a steel fabricated tower that provides electricity for approximately 300,000 residential, commercial and industrial customers in the Quad Cities Area. The 65 foot wide tower at its base on Winnebago Island supports the electric transmission line as it crosses the Mississippi River from MidAmerican's Riverside Generating Station in Riverdale, Iowa to Substation E in East Moline, Illinois. The original grant was issued for a 200 foot wide ROW in an east-west direction across the island for a distance of approximately 100 feet for a period of 50 years. The transmission line has been in continuous use since its construction in August 1964. It was constructed to meet or exceed the minimum requirements for transmission line construction as prescribed by the National Electrical Safety Code. There will be no new construction associated with the re-authorization of the existing transmission line and tower. Rent for the ROW if granted will be calculated using a per acre rent schedule published in accordance 43 CFR 2806.20 beginning with the expiration of the original grant in 2012 for a 200 foot wide and 115 foot long ROW across Winnebago Island.

2.2 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under a No Action Alternative the existing transmission line and tower would not be re-authorized under FLPMA and the facilities would be in trespass on Federal land. Trespass regulations would require the removal of the transmission lines and tower on Winnebago Island and the restoration of the land to its original condition.

2.3 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED FROM FURTHER ANALYSIS

Relocation of the transmission line and tower constructed on Winnebago Island was considered but eliminated from further analysis because Winnebago Island lines up with the existing land route of the transmission line midway across the Mississippi River. Re-routing the existing line would require more than just the removal and re-construction of the facilities in the immediate area because the lines on either side of the Mississippi River would also need to be relocated. The impacts to the environment and the costs of new construction under this alternative would be significantly greater and would provide no environmental benefit.

3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Winnebago Island is a small island located in the Mississippi River north of the Quad Cities in Rock Island County, Illinois. The island, also referred to as Dynamite Island, straddles the Iowa-Illinois boundary just west of Campbell Island near the city of East Moline. Winnebago Island is located in one of the largest metropolitan areas along the Mississippi River between Minneapolis and St. Louis and it supports a population of approximately 390,000. The region, once a major center for agricultural manufacturing and telecommunications, is undergoing redefinition as changes in the national economy have disrupted the region's industrial base.

A survey of the island conducted in 1962 determined that the island consisted of 1.4 acres, but since that time, the island has significantly increased in size. Changes in size and shoreline over the past 30 years can be attributed to the placement of dredged materials below the high water mark by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) for channel improvement. Winnebago Island is located in Pool #15 on the Mississippi River. Dredging materials from Pool #15 placed around the island have filled in over time with river sediment creating a larger land mass and a rocky shoreline. Cadastral Survey has determined that the island is now approximately 7.5 acres. Although the length of the island has increased significantly, the island still averages to be about 100 feet wide. The width of the island at the centerline of the ROW has been estimated to be 115 feet through the application of geographic information system technology.

The area around Winnebago Island, located where the Mississippi and the Rock Rivers converge, provides countless miles of water trails with urban and natural shorelines and landscapes. Even though this is a popular area for recreation, there are limited public river landing resources in Pool #15. In the 1970's, the island was a popular boating and swimming area, but changes in shoreline and vegetation no longer make the island attractive for recreational use. The sandy shoreline that once attracted boaters and picnickers has been replaced with a rocky shoreline and stronger river currents that make docking on the island more difficult. In addition to using the island for dredged materials, the ACOE constructed a wing dam between Winnebago and Campbell Islands to the east, and deepened the main channel west of Winnebago Island.

The following human environment or resource elements on Winnebago Island have been reviewed and were determined to be either not present, or not affected by the proposed action to renew a long-standing electric transmission power-line. No sensitive or unique resource values were identified. The following elements will not be discussed further in this document.

- Fish Habitat
- Forests and Rangelands
- Migratory Birds
- Native American Religious Concerns
- Threatened or Endangered Species
- Farm Lands, Prime or Unique
- Wastes, hazardous or solid
- Water Quality; Drinking/Ground
- Wild and Scenic Rivers
- Wilderness/WSAs/ACECs
- Air Quality
- Global Climate Change
- Paleontology
- Range / Livestock Grazing
- Recreation / Visual Resource Management
- Sensitive Status Plants
- Wetlands/Riparian Areas/Floodplains
- Cultural Resources
- Wildlife/BLM Sensitive Species

3.1 LAND USE

The land on Winnebago Island has been only used by the occasional river traveler, and less so today than in the 1970's before the island changed and expanded with ACOE activity. Although the island is withdrawn for wildlife purposes, the FWS has not managed the island as part of the Upper Mississippi River National Fish and Wildlife Refuge. Nevertheless, because of its natural state, the island has been home to many migratory and native birds. Because the island was excess to its needs, the FWS submitted a request to the BLM in 1961 to revoke the withdrawal. Although a revocation was requested, a modification to revoke the original withdrawal for Winnebago Island was not processed. In 1972, the BLM conveyed the island to the Illinois Department of Conservation under the Recreation and Public Purposes (R&PP) Act, but in 1983, title to the land reverted in the United States because the State failed to develop recreational facilities on the island. Other groups have expressed an interest in acquiring the land under the R&PP Act for recreational purposes, but not in recent years.

Except for the construction of the 65 foot wide electric transmission tower on the south end of the island in 1964, the land has remained undeveloped. Maintenance of the tower has required occasional inspections for hardware repair and repair of aircraft warning lights, but no other maintenance or ground disturbance has taken place or is expected to take place during the next 20 year term of the proposed re-authorization.

3.2 WILDLIFE

The island consists of a mix of open habitat likely consisting of coralberry, dropseed, eastern gramagrass, leadplant, prairie cordgrass, roundhead lespedeza, smooth sumac and switch grass and woodland habitat likely consisting of common hackberry, eastern cottonwood, pin oak, river birch, swamp white oak and sweetgum. The vegetation on the island has expanded as the island has increased in size due to dredging activities by the US Army Corps of Engineers. The island is used by birds for shelter during migration, nesting, and foraging. Other wildlife (i.e. raccoons, deer and rodents) that can reach the island either by swimming or crossing ice in the winter months may also utilize the island during all or part of the year. According to the Fish and Wildlife Service the vegetation on the island is suitable for a pelican rookery and the FWS anticipates that a rookery could establish on the island in the future.

3.3 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE/SOCIOECONOMICS

Winnebago Island is located in one of the largest metropolitan areas along the Mississippi River between Minneapolis and St. Louis and it supports a population of approximately 390,000. The existing transmission line and associated tower provides electricity for approximately 300,000 residential, commercial and industrial customers in the Quad Cities Area.

Executive Order 12898 (1994) formally requires Federal agencies to incorporate environmental justice as part of their missions. Specifically, it directs agencies to address, as appropriate, any disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their actions, programs, or policies on minority or low-income populations. The proposed action will not create disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority populations and low-income populations, including tribal populations. No further analysis is warranted for Environmental Justice factors on this project.

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The affected environment was considered and analyzed and resources of concern, except for land use and wildlife, were either not present, or would not be affected to a degree that would require a detailed analysis in the EA. The lands were reviewed for sensitive and endangered species and for cultural resources, but no impacts from the re-authorization of the existing electric transmission line and tower across the island were identified.

4.1 LAND USE

PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action to extend the existing ROW for a 20 year renewable term will not impact the minimal use of the land by the occasional river traveler and the use of the land for migratory bird or wildlife habitat. The tower has been in place for over 50 years and no new land disturbance will be authorized with the renewal of the ROW. The tower was already in place when the land was conveyed in 1972 under the R&PP Act for recreational use and the reauthorization of the ROW would not limit future recreational uses if any were to be proposed. A future proposal to convey the island under the R&PP Act would be made subject to the existing transmission line ROW.

NO ACTION

Removing the tower on the island would result in a temporary disturbance on the island that could impact the occasional river traveler or habitat for native and migratory birds, but it would not have a lasting impact.

4.2 WILDLIFE

PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action will have no new effect on the wildlife habitat as the transmission tower has existed on the island since 1964 and predates NEPA. The only disturbance associated with the tower would be an annual fly by with intermittent maintenance activities that have occurred since its construction in 1964 and would not change the management of the area or change any current impacts that may occur to wildlife. Raptors and other large birds flying through the area do have the risk of flying into the line or causing issues by nesting on the tower itself. These actions could be mitigated by requiring the operator to utilize anti-perch or anti-nesting devices and marking their lines to make them more visible, however no mitigation activity is 100% effective.

NO ACTION

The no-action alternative would result in the removal of the structure and a temporary degradation of less than one acre of wildlife habitat, as it would require some demolition activity on the island. Restoration of the land to its original condition would likely entail grading the area to a natural-appearing contour and seeding it with a native seed mix to aid in erosion-control. Disturbance related to removal could also provide a substrate for noxious and invasive species to take hold on the island and require multiple years of treatment. With the amount of moisture on the island it is likely that in one to two growing seasons native vegetation would be established and would provide functioning forage and habitat for wildlife. Once reclamation

goals are met the area would be more accessible to wildlife especially large birds that may become injured by power lines and their associated structures. However, the end product would bring the island back to a more natural state.

4.3 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE/SOCIOECONOMICS

PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action will have no new effect on environmental justice/socioeconomics for Rock Island County. The existing transmission line has been in operation providing essential electric energy to the Quad Cities since 1964, and would continue to provide electricity for the Quad Cities metropolitan area over the life of the 20 year re-authorization of the ROW grant. The power generated by this transmission line allows a wide variety of indispensable economic activities to take place that support the population.

NO ACTION

Removal of the transmission line and associated tower would have an immediate and negative impact on a population of approximately 390,000. The existing transmission line and associated tower provides electricity for approximately 300,000 residential, commercial and industrial customers in the Quad Cities Area. In the short term, it is safe to assume that millions of dollars of economic activity would be eliminated if the tower and transmission line are removed and the ROW grant is not re-authorized, until new sources of power could be located and purchased.

5.0 CUMULATIVE AND RESIDUAL EFFECTS

Because there are no direct impacts (section 4.0), there are no cumulative impacts.

6.0 CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

List of Persons, Agencies and Organizations Consulted

Name	Purpose & Authorities for Consultation or Coordination	Findings & Conclusions
Jason C. Bramwell U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Bloomington, Minnesota	Determined process for responding to expired ROW and application for re-authorization 43 CFR 2800 and 603 DM 1	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is not the owner of Winnebago Island and is not the appropriate agency to process the application from MidAmerican Energy.
Bob Clevenstein U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Rock Island, Illinois	Identification of issues for the re-authorization of the ROW and any potential impacts on future uses	Island is not suitable for recreation due to its rocky shoreline and channel improvements. No special concerns regarding the reauthorization of the ROW were presented.
Jeff Craver Rock Island County Forest Preserve District Rock Island, Illinois	Identification of issues for the re-authorization of the ROW and any potential impacts and future uses	Island is suitable for wildlife habitat but not for recreation due to the strong currents in the river surrounding the island. The District would not be interested in developing recreational uses on the island.
Joseph Miller	Identification of issues for the	Limited recreational opportunities in

East Moline Park District East Moline, Illinois	re-authorization of the ROW and any potential impacts and future uses	Pool #15 but the island is outside of the District's boundaries for acquisition.
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List of BLM Preparers


Name	Title	Responsible for the Following Section(s) of this Document
Carol Grundman	Realty Specialist, Preparer	Proposed Action, Purpose and Need, Conformance with Land Use Plans, Relationship to Statues and Regulations, No Action Alternative, Land Use and Resource Values
Kurt Wadzinski	Planning and Environmental Coordinator, Editor	Document Review
Kyle Schumacher	Natural Resources Specialist	Threatened and Endangered Species; Fish and Wildlife; Invasive Species/Noxious Weeds; Recreation; Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Animal Species/Migratory Birds; Wetlands/Riparian Zones; Vegetation; Air and Water Quality; Farmlands; Floodplains; Soils; Hazardous Wastes
Jarrodd Kellogg	Archeologist	Cultural Resources

7.0 LITERATURE CITED


Illinois Resource Management Plan approved September 30, 1987, Milwaukee District Office, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Department of the Interior. Milwaukee, Wisconsin.


Preparer

7-25-14
Date


Planning & Environmental Coordinator

7/25/2014
Date


Assistant Field Manager
Division of Natural Resources

12 AUG 14
Date

Appendix A

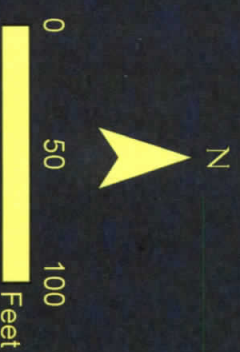
MAPS

**Winnego Island
T18N R1 W Sec. 24
Rock Island County, IL**

Island Width At Tower

115 Feet

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Winebago Island
T18N R1 W
Rock Island IL

1962 Plat

4-1.40
ANC

N. 80° 46' E.
47.935 CHS.

Sec. 24

1/4 SEC. COR.

0 250 500 1,000
Feet



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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-ES030-2014-03-EA
Winnebago Island Right-of-Way
Electric Transmission Line and Tower
Rock Island County, Illinois

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the attached environmental assessment, and considering the significance criteria in 40 CFR 1508.27, I have determined that the proposed action to re-authorize an existing electric transmission line and tower across Winnebago Island in Rock Island County, Illinois under Section 501 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act will not have a significant effect on the human environment. An environmental impact statement is therefore not required.

Authorized Officer: _____



Field Manager
Northeastern States Field Office

8/15/2014

Date